With all the planning, terrain walking, and briefings in preparation for the live fire, there is a danger of its becoming routine. There are several techniques to keep this from happening.

The first is to conduct all blank and MILES training on similar terrain instead of on the actual lane to be used. While it may be feasible to walk all leaders through the actual lane to talk about MSDs and safety considerations, there is no need to let the troops see the ground they're going to fight for until it is time. If money is tight, just doing a tactical exercise without troops (TEWT) is good.

Another way to maintain realism and the free flow of the event is to provide more than one way to do it. That is, let the squad or platoon leader decide which flank is best for setting up the support position and let him figure out where the limit of advance is. This requires detailed planning and thorough reconnaissance, but it can be done.

No artificial range-limiting stakes or phase-line markers should be allowed. If properly planned and surveyed, this approach adds a great deal of realism. Trails, streams, and unique terrain provide all the indicators needed to keep the bullets going in the right direction and the lead fire team just outside MSD.

Finally, an execution or brevity checklist for the leaders and safety personnel should be mandatory. A list of key events given an alpha-numeric code keeps everyone on track. This, added into the H-hour, keeps everyone informed. This improves flexibility; for example, if the assault is over early, the extraction aircraft can come in on call instead of waiting for a specific time. It trains radiotelephone operators and leaders to be concise and flexible and doesn't tie up time on the radio when everyone is ready to move out.

Planning for a company live fire should begin at least four months ahead. Platoons need about half that long. Squad lanes can be put together rather easily, but in keeping with the intent of Field Manual 25-101, *Battle Focused Training*, five weeks out is not too early. Early in the planning cycle, the commander should circle the tasks in the MTP that he wants his company trained on and offer it to the platoon leaders and platoon sergeants for their input during his training meeting. Once he has his list of tasks, the commander should not add any more unless it makes sense tactically.

During the train-up, he should make sure the junior leaders stress the fundamentals and conduct plenty of rehearsals. These include common skills often overlooked such as reducing a stoppage, magazine and barrel quick-change, misfire procedures, and collective skills, such as breaching a wire obstacle, maintaining continuous suppressive fire, continuous movement, and consolidation and reorganization. Once on the range, he should let no element go downrange until he is convinced that it is properly trained.

After-action reviews, as the combat training centers have discovered, are significantly improved by video. Video shows in real time the sequencing of events and what really happened. Troops and leaders get caught up in the action and sometimes remember very little after it's over. One or two well-placed, inconspicuous video recorders can make all the difference. Also, every soldier who pulled a trigger should submit a written critique with suggestions. It is interesting to see the comments, and good ideas from them will improve future training.

A properly executed live fire is the best training for building teamwork, cohesion, and confidence. Tough and realistic training are the watchwords of today's smaller Army. In preparation for combat, nothing beats the multi-echelon training gained from the conception, planning, coordination, rehearsal, and execution of a safe, well organized small-unit live fire.

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The Platoon Raid
Leader's Reconnaissance and Fire Control

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The raid is probably the most difficult and challenging of all the tasks on an infantry platoon mission essential task list (METL), but it can also be the most rewarding for its leaders. The raid requires extensive planning and a large measure of autonomy in execution. Frequently, in a raid, there are no adjacent units—left, right, or front—to depend on in the event

of enemy contact. Platoons frequently operate deep behind enemy lines, outside friendly direct fire support, and within range of only limited friendly indirect fire support. Platoon plans must therefore be detailed, fully rehearsed, and adequately war-gamed for a wide array of contingencies.

The troop-leading procedures and the tactics and techniques for conducting a successful raid are covered adequately in various field manuals and other publications. In this article, we will focus instead on two important considerations in the planning and execution process—the leaders' reconnaissance and fire control.

Although platoons do a good job of backward planning, with detailed schedules and good rehearsals, sometimes their performance on the objective is still best described as chaotic.

Intelligence pertaining to an objective is often either scarce or outdated. Platoon leader mission statements do not contain exact coordinates but are prefaced instead with "in the vicinity of." This is not unrealistic, however, because targets that are appropriate for platoon-size operations are frequently perishable and time sensitive, and their locations may be unclear. Under these conditions, about all a platoon can do before infiltration is to conduct a good generic rehearsal on similar terrain—making the most of well-developed unit SOPs, coordinating with supporting units, and sending out a reconnaissance element.

Still, many platoons fail to allocate enough time for the leaders' reconnaissance in the backward planning process. In practice, too much time is spent in a secure area, infiltration time is generally miscalculated, and too little time is allocated to the actual reconnaissance and the subsequent backbrief to soldiers.

A leaders' reconnaissance is laborious and time-consuming. Movement in and around an objective area requires stealth and is by its nature slow and deliberate. If movement in and around the area of interest is hasty and careless, the patrol is apt to be compromised. Infiltrations to objective areas always take more time than is scheduled; as a result, not enough time is available for the reconnaissance of the objective itself. In any event, platoons find that they must hustle if the raid is to take place at the prescribed time.

Units should also strongly consider using advance reconnaissance. Any snipers that may be attached to the platoon or provided for the operation should be used immediately to conduct reconnaissance on the target. Snipers are especially good for reconnaissance, and with little probability of compromise. Still, the organic reconnaissance capability within a platoon cannot be discounted. Immediately after a platoon leader receives a mission, and if he decides advance reconnaissance is practical, he must give the reconnaissance element specific requirements that support his tentative concept. He must make sure a link-up and communications plan is coordinated and the reconnaissance party deployed quickly. Good SOPs can reduce the amount of guidance and coordination needed for the reconnaissance element.

The reconnaissance element can pinpoint the objective; identify potential assault, support, and security positions; identify likely avenues of approach; identify key targets for direct and indirect fires; provide continuous surveillance on the target; and act as guides for the main body in and around the objective area. Prior reconnaissance reduces the time needed for the leaders' reconnaissance and significantly decreases the chance of compromise.

Prior reconnaissance is not, however, a substitute for the leaders' reconnaissance. The leaders' reconnaissance is intended to accomplish two purposes: pinpoint the objective, and confirm the concept of the operation. The concept of the operation prior to infiltration may be sketchy at best, and the information gained on the reconnaissance will permit the platoon leader to decide upon the best course of action.

Once a platoon is in the objective area, the terrain may offer some unique challenges. The platoon leader at the objective rally point (ORP) must confirm his list of leaders to take along on the reconnaissance. In this process, he must realistically consider the time available and the potential for compromise. He must take at least his element leaders, and when prudent, their subordinate team leaders as well.

Ideally, the platoon leader, support element leader, assault element leader, and element team leaders should conduct reconnaissance from the assault and support positions. It is from these positions and other vantage points in the vicinity of the objective that the concept of operations is really formulated, cultivated, and finalized. Here, the plan is synchronized—wargamed, in fact.

The support team leader has to have an intimate knowledge of the way the assault team will actually assault the objective. If obstacle breaching is in order, this knowledge is absolutely critical. The platoon leader, support team leader, and assault team leader must wargame the concept from every prudent position to fully synchronize troop movement in and around the objective with the indirect and direct fires.

While the leaders are forward completing the plan, the rest of the force is at the ORP making final preparations. After the platoon's leaders return to the ORP, the team leaders need time to backbrief the soldiers. Often, due to time or anxiety, this step is streamlined or eliminated. But all the wargaming and synchronization conducted thus far is worthless if the leaders cannot brief the individual soldiers on the modifications to the original plan and on the pre-planned fire control measures.

Since the raid will take place on the enemy side of the FLOT (forward line of own troops), resupply is generally not an option. The ammunition a unit takes

along in the beginning must be enough to accomplish the mission with a reasonable amount left for use in the exfiltration. Regardless of the ammunition taken on the mission, ammunition discipline is still a major concern.

The platoon will consider and rehearse many fire control measures during the planning process and through the employment of SOPs. But every objective is different, and a generic rehearsal can only do so much. When anxiety and the conditions presented by limited visibility are added, fire control is tough.

The support element cannot just traverse the guns across the objective and "hose it down" in an attempt to suppress the enemy. First, a platoon does not have enough ammunition for indiscriminate firing and, second, the likelihood of fratricide increases. The support element must work closely with the assault element to suppress the appropriate portion of the objective at the right moment to keep the enemy from delivering aimed fire. Additionally, the support element must prevent enemy troops who are not directly opposing the assault from repositioning to points that allow them to interfere with the assault. (*See "Range Cards in the Deliberate Attack," Captain Chester A. Char and First Sergeant Dewayne Chapman, INFANTRY, September-October 1992, pages 33-35.*)

Weapon systems need specific targets. During the reconnaissance, sectors are identified and, within reason, specific targets are identified for major weapons. In the plan, targets need to be identified for antiarmor weapons (AT-4s, LAWs, Dragons), M203 grenade launchers, and light and heavy machineguns. Even the riflemen's fires are directed by their team leaders. A good technique that has been used for years is for the team leader to load his magazines primarily with tracer ammunition. He can then direct the team's fires by focusing his tracer fires at the center of the team's sector of responsibility.

Once the assault is initiated, the support and assault elements engage previously identified targets; the automatic weapons fire for several seconds at a cyclic rate of fire to achieve surprise and fire superiority, then quickly transition to a sustained rate of fire. Snipers are especially valuable in engaging such priority targets as key leaders, radiotelephone operators, and crew-served weapon gunners.

By this point, significant damage should have been inflicted on the enemy, or at least enough confusion for the assault to begin. A simple but effective gauge for determining when to assault is the accuracy and density of the return fire. At this juncture, the actual assault is not a chaotic footrace across the objective; it is orchestrated by its leaders in accordance with the concept of operation and then modified as the situation develops. As the assault breaches and progresses across the target, the support element engages secondary and tertiary targets.

The support element, in concert with the assault element, must suppress enemy positions that directly affect the assault. Aimed enemy fire must be suppressed. Machineguns must be mounted on tripods with traversing and elevating mechanisms; they work best in pairs, alternately firing (in six-to-nine-round bursts) at specific targets. The guns must sustain fire throughout the assault, which may take several minutes. Suppressing the enemy does not require a great volume of fire, but it does require sustained, well-aimed fire. The support element leaders must rigidly monitor the rate of fire. A support element leader, using binoculars or night vision goggles, directs the assistant gunners and, in turn, the gunners to suppress targets according to the plan and the progress of the assault. All members of the support element are alert for prearranged signals that shift or lift supporting fires.

A few of the many methods of controlling fire are established sectors, timing, pen-gun flares, handheld starclusters, M203 starcluster rounds, leaders' weapons loaded with a high density of tracer rounds, chemlights, covert handheld lasers, events that signal a reaction, and distinctive uniform markings. Regardless of the methods used, a platoon can save much time and effort by standardizing methods in SOPs, training to perfect these methods, and deviating by exception only.

One method that works especially well is chemlight bundles. Once the assault team clears a bunker or a portion of an assigned target, the team leader throws an infrared chemlight bundle that marks the new left or right limit for supporting fires. The support element acknowledges by also throwing an infrared chemlight bundle. This method is repeated across the objective until supporting fires are no longer needed.

Another method that can be used to assist the support team during execution is marking the assault element's left and right limits with infrared chemlights. And, of course, there is no substitute for good marksmanship. Disciplined soldiers engage suspected or known enemy positions and practice ammunition awareness.

A raid is a difficult and challenging mission. How does a platoon excel at it? By remembering the basics—individual marksmanship, crew proficiency, and basic team and squad movement techniques. A platoon leader must use good judgment and—on the basis of METT-T (mission, enemy, terrain, troops, and time)—plan adequate time for the unit's infiltration, the leaders' reconnaissance, and adequate briefings for the individual soldiers.

To receive a *Trained* rating, a platoon must meet all established Army standards. In many categories, the evaluation is subjective. Nonetheless, a platoon leader can be confident when his platoon is trained to accomplish the mission under the conditions of live fire, and at night.

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